

DATE: JUNE 21, 2005

TO: SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY  
AND HUMAN RESOURCES

FROM: MARTIN COUNTY SHERIFF BRAD GERHARDT

Honorable Members of the Committee:

Martin County is located in South Central Minnesota right on the Iowa border. The County covers 720 square miles with 21,800 inhabitants, is dotted with approximately 50 lakes, and provides a very pristine rural lifestyle. That was until about 6 years ago, when the methamphetamine epidemic started to creep into southern Minnesota from Iowa. What do we do about this?

#### EDUCATE:

The law enforcement community in our area started to learn more and more about “Meth” and its effects on people. We hit the internet and enlisted help from neighboring agencies as well as Federal Agents in search of more information.

Agent Cotner of the DEA was extremely helpful. Law Enforcement also utilized the radio as a media resource and conducted phone-in programs to help the public become more aware. We learned early on that it took many agencies to respond to the meth issue. In the past few years our Sheriff’s Office has dealt with Local, State, and Federal Law Enforcement Agencies including, ATF, DEA, POSTAL INSPECTORS, FBI, SECRET, SERVICE, ICE, just to name a few. Other agencies include HSEM, AG., Public Health, Human Services, Corrections, Pollution Control, Probation (local and state), Retail, Schools, Prosecution and the County and Federal Courts. This is just a snapshot of how the response to meth involves multiple agencies. We hosted a community education program presented by Environmental Health Scientist, Deborah Durkin, of the MN Dept. of Health. This was covered by local media and played repeatedly on the local cable access channel.

#### RESPOND:

Our local County Board passed a meth clean-up ordinance with regard to labs and dump sites. Two Law Enforcement Officers from our County were trained in response to meth labs, mainly due to the toxic nature of the labs. This atmosphere creates a very hazardous work environment which could potentially evolve into worker’s compensation problems. OSHA standards then came into play and the training involved tens of thousands of dollars in equipment. Now that we have people trained, we have to be concerned with re-certification. Our multi-county drug task

force was faced with an large increase in case load. As a County, we were dealing with an increasing population in our jail to the point where we have formed a “Justice Council” and are studying the potential construction of a new jail. Just last year we spent nearly \$150,000.00 in out of County housing costs due largely in part to the increase in Meth use. Law Enforcement in our area has responded to numerous meth-related calls including an attempted “Execution” style shooting, as well as people getting burned from Lab’s that are blowing up. We had one case of a barricaded suspect which resulted in an 18 hour standoff involving two SWAT teams - all over an “8-ball” of meth. “These things (meth labs) are bombs waiting to go off,” stated Sheriff Borchardt of Olmsted County. Truly, they are. Several fires of suspicious origin have occurred in Martin County over the past several years. All these issues take resources. Certainly, there are many types of crimes associated with the highly addictive nature of the drug. We deal with property crimes, check fraud, credit card fraud, identity theft whatever it takes to feed the habit and ignore all those around you.

**TRAIN:** We spent countless hours training our officers, fire departments and local public health as well as our citizens on meth issues as it relates to at risk youth, cars, property, etc. We use HSEM money for terrorism as a means to respond to the meth issue. When you think Homeland Security and the response that it triggers you can make a direct correlation to the meth issue. CBRNE is an acronym associated with terrorism response. Chemical, Biological and Explosive also apply to meth. We purchased decontamination equipment locally, as well as regionally, for haz-mat type issues. We’ve trained and feel adequate in dealing with contamination.

**PREVENTION:** Our County Seat of Fairmont has created a reward of \$1,000.00 locally for the discovery of a “Meth” lab. This, teamed with our educational piece I mentioned earlier certainly lends itself favorably toward prevention. Retailers are taking this issue seriously by voluntarily removing precursors as well as educating their staff on what to look for and to advise law enforcement of any suspicious purchases. Our state legislature has also grasped the aforementioned philosophy and is helping cities and counties in Minnesota with regard to “Meth Watch”, a retail awareness program, as well as revolving loan funds for toxic waste clean up.

**PROJECT SURROUND PHILOSOPHY:** This philosophy is somewhat response and somewhat prevention I’ll explain. “Project Surround” is a philosophy created locally after a class of “Blandin Community Leadership Students” attended the week long Blandin retreat. The Blandin Foundation is a Minnesota Foundation created for rural Minnesota after tragedy struck the Blandin family in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They realized that rural areas need support and leaders need to be trained. Project Surround involves the community working with “at-risk” youth. They learned early on that the youth involved need a sense of connectedness and also need to contribute to society as well as have long term case management. With that in mind, the “Services for Challenging Youth” committee was formed and the following initiatives were created: Kinship and Martin County Mentoring satisfy the connectedness. Brief Strategic Family Therapy, BSFT and Weekend Consequential Camp, WCC help with the contribution to society. Finally addressing the issue of long term case management, we are currently working on a model for after school programming and have it 70% funded. This program includes a meal (which is very important for our Challenging Youth), recreation, time to complete homework,

family therapy and individual therapy for chemical dependency (CD) issues, as well as a vocational skills component involving a Doctoral candidate who is doing a thesis on this program. We also hope to get a Doctoral candidate in Economics from the University of Chicago to study the potential out of home placement savings that this program will hopefully address.

**CLOSING:** So, what does all this mean? In short, it means we are leaving no stone unturned.

We realize that the long term victims in the meth situation are the youth. As a County we've recognized that issue and have surrounded our youth with many services, all done locally and with local dollars. We are happy with our success so far. Our meth crimes seem to be down a fraction and our jail population, so far in 2005, has been down about 2 to 3 inmates a day. Our labs are down significantly, but our neighboring agencies are experiencing some increases. Northern Minnesota seems to be getting hit harder this year than in the past. Like anything, funding seems to be the key critical component. If you take a look at how meth has brought so many agencies together, you realize that an atmosphere of "inter-connectedness" is extremely critical. We are so lucky in Martin County to have ALL agencies focused, poised and willing to maintain a spirit of cooperation on this issue. Myself and my staff are often asked to speak on this issue statewide as well as a couple of national venues. I can only tell you that as a small agency, we are flattered, but time away from the office is critical. We'd like to help more, but to do so we need a larger budget and more staff. Let's bring our communities, counties, and elected officials together. I fully believe that through tough laws, education, and unwavering collaboration we can beat this scourge called meth.

Respectfully,  
Brad Gerhardt  
Martin County Sheriff